

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 0387

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, BG, US

SUBJECT: HYDROGRAPHIC RESEARCH SHIP FOR BANGLADESH

REFS: A. 76 DACCA 6415 B. 76 STATE 305325

1. DURING OUR TALK ON JANUARY 23, CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR MAJOR GENERAL ZIA REITERATED THE POSITION TAKEN BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY ON OUR OFFER TO MAKE AVAILABLE A 320 TON MINESWEEPER FOR CONVERSION TO HYDROGRAPHIC RESEARCH PURPOSES. ZIA SAID THE BDG GREATLY APPRECIATED OUR OFFER BUT VERY MUCH HOPED WE COULD FIND A LARGER SHIP (750 TO 1,000 TONS) FOR THIS PURPOSE CONSIDERING THE DIFFICULTY OF OPERATING IN THE BAY OF BANGAL IN A SMALL SHIP DURING THE CYCLONE SEASON. ZIA SAID HE FACES A REAL PROBLEM WITH MORALE IN THE ARMED FORCES. THE LARGER VESSEL WOULD NOT ONLY BE EXTREMELY USEFUL FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES, BUT WOULD ALSO HELP PROVIDE USEFUL WORK FOR CURRENTLY UNDER-EMPLOYED MILITARY PERSONNEL.

2. WHEN I PRESSED HIM ON THE TYPE OF EQUIPMENT HE SEEKS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES, ZIA SAID THE MISSION
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OF THE BANGLADESH ARMED FORCES WAS PRESERVATION OF INTERNAL SECURITY. THEY COULD NOT DEFEND AGAINST AN ALL-OUT ATTACK BY INDIA AND HAD NO NEED FOR HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS. IN ANY EVENT, THEY LACKED FUNDS TO PAY FOR THEM AND HE KNEW THAT ECONOMIC AID DONORS WOULD COMPLAIN IF THE BDG USED ITS LIMITED FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESOURCES FOR THESE PURPOSES. THEREFORE,

IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IF WE COULD FIND A SOMEWHAT LARGER SHIP THAN THE ONE ORIGINALLY OFFERED FOR CONVERSION TO RESEARCH USES AT MODEST COST. I SAID WE WERE LOOKING INTO THE POSSIBILITIES AND I WOULD BE IN TOUCH AS SOON AS OUR SURVEY WAS COMPLETED.

3. COMMENT: ZIA AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE A VALID POINT ABOUT WEATHER CONDITIONS IN THE BAY. IF AN APPROPRIATE SHIP IN THE 750 TO 1,000 TON RANGE IS AVAILABLE, I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE PUT TO GOOD USE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AND ALSO HELP IMPROVE MORALE IN THE ARMED FORCES.

4. ON OTHER MILITARY MATTERS, ZIA SAID AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED WITH THE UK FOR HELP IN ESTABLISHING AN ARMED FORCES STAFF COLLEGE IN BANGLADESH. HE EXPECTS IT TO BE OPERATIONAL BY THE END OF THE YEAR. (THE UK HIGH COMMISSIONER CONFIRMED THIS.) ZIA TALKED IN SOME DETAIL ABOUT DETERIORATION OF BASIC SKILLS IN THE MILITARY SERVICES SINCE 1971 AND SAID HE GREATLY APPRECIATES OUR WILLINGNESS TO INITIATE A SMALL TRAINING PROGRAM IN FY 77 TO HELP MEET THE URGENT NEED FOR BASIC TECHNICAL SKILLS. MASTERS

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